

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: EG, IS, PINR

SUBJECT: INTSUM 555 - MAY 2, 1978

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING
PARIS FOR NICHOLAS MURPHY
OTHER ADDRESSEES FOR CHIEFS OF MISSION

1. US-ME. EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER KAMIL STATED YESTERDAY THAT THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT IS STUDYING US CLARIFICATIONS OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT ON A PALESTINIAN STATE TO THE SUNDAY TIMES. EMBASSY CAIRO OBSERVED THAT THE DENIAL AND THE SECRETARY'S STATEMENTS ARE HELPFUL AND REASSURING TO THE EGYPTIANS. NEVERTHELESS, SOME DAMAGE WAS DONE TO CONFIDENCE IN THE US AND THE EGYPTIANS WILL BE LOOKING HARD AT US STATEMENTS DURING CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS ON THE ARMS SALE.

2. SADAT'S MAY DAY SPEECH TODAY IS LIKELY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE IN THE PEACE PROCESS AS WELL AS SERIOUS ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. (SOME ARAB OBSERVERS IN OTHER CAPITALS BELIEVE SADAT WILL SHARPLY CRITICIZE PRESIDENT CARTER'S STATEMENT.) EMBASSY CAIRO DOES NOT RULE OUT SOME "SHOCKS". SADAT'S FAVORITE JOURNALIST WAS HEARD TO REMARK THAT PRIME MINISTER SALEM AND SOME OTHER

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MINISTERS WILL BE REPLACED.

3. OTHER ARAB MEDIA REACTIONS TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S MIDDLE EAST STATEMENT HAVE BEEN GENERALLY NEGATIVE:

(A) HEADLINES IN ONE KUWAITI DAILY CHARACTERIZED THE REMARKS AS A "POLICY ABOUT-FACE" AND A "SURPRISING...ABANDONMENT OF SADAT."

(B) RADIO RIYADH COMMENTED THAT THE REMARKS ATTRIBUTED TO THE PRESIDENT, IF TRUE, WOULD "INEVITABLY HARM EFFORTS...TO REACH A JUST COMPREHENSIVE SOLUTION...AND WILL ALSO ENCOURAGE ISRAEL IN ITS AGGRESSIVE POLICY."

(C) RADIO AMMAN VIEWED THE STATEMENT AS A DEMONSTRATION OF THE US "FAILURE TO PERSUADE ISRAEL TO CHANGE ITS ATTITUDE." FURTHERMORE, THEY REFLECT US RECOGNITION OF "THE LEGITIMACY OF ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION OF PALESTINIAN LAND."

(D) RADIO DAMASCUS ASSAILED THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS AS PROVING THAT THE DIFFERENCES OF VIEWS WHICH OCCASIONALLY CROP UP BETWEEN THE US AND ISRAEL AS "PURE NONSENSE". SYRIA ALSO USED THE COMMENTS AS AN EXCUSE TO FLAIL SADAT FOR HIS CONTINUING RELIANCE ON THE US.

(E) BETHLEHEM MAYOR FREIJ WAS STRONGLY CRITICAL OF THE REMARKS AND WAS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT IF THE REPORTS ARE TRUE, "THERE IS NO REASON FOR CONTINUING THE PEACEFUL INITIATIVE" OF PRESIDENT SADAT.

4. THE SOVIET WEEKEND MEDIA USED THE PRESIDENT'S INTERVIEW WITH THE LONDON SUNDAY TIMES AS THE BASIS FOR A WIDE-SECRET

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SPREAD ATTACK ON US MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND ITS ARAB SUPPORTERS. TASS AND RADIO MOSCOW COMMENT CLAIMED THE PRESIDENT'S STATED OPPOSITION TO CREATION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE SHOWS THAT WASHINGTON CONTINUES TO IGNORE THE PALESTINIANS' RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION AND FULLY SUPPORTS BEGIN'S PLAN FOR RESOLVING THE WEST BANK AND GAZA PROBLEMS.

5. MEANWHILE, TASS AND RADIO MOSCOW'S INTERNATIONAL SERVICES HAD CHARGED THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DEFENSE OF THE AIRCRAFT SALE AS BEING IN THE US AND ISRAELI INTEREST "PROVED" WASHINGTON BACKS ISRAEL'S "POLICY OF ANNEXATION". COMMENTARY ALSO ASSERTED THAT US WILLINGNESS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL ARMS TO TEL AVIV, AND INSISTENCE ON ARAB GUARANTEES THAT US AIRCRAFT WILL NOT BE USED AGAINST ISRAEL, SHOULD DISPEL ANY ILLUSIONS AMONG ARAB LEADERS (SADAT WAS MENTIONED DIRECTLY) THAT WASHINGTON WILL CHANGE ITS POLICY IN THEIR FAVOR. (CONFIDENTIAL)

6. SAUDI ARABIA. AS A DECISION ON THE F-15 SALE DRAWS CLOSER, THERE IS A MOOD OF GROWING CONCERN AMONG THE SAUDI POLITICAL HIERARCHY AND THE ROYAL FAMILY. IN PART, THIS ANXIETY REFLECTS THE STRAIN OF HAVING TO DEAL WITH THE PRESSING PROBLEMS OF OIL PRODUCTION, INTERNATIONAL MONETARY STABILITY, FOREIGN INVESTMENT, AND SECURITY AT THE SAME TIME. OF GREATER IMPORTANCE, HOWEVER, THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE US IS SEEN BY THE SAUDIS AS CRUCIAL TO THEIR EFFORTS TO COPE WITH THESE PROBLEMS, AND THE F-15 SALE HAS BECOME THE BELLWETHER OF THESE RELATIONS.

7. THE SAUDIS HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING ALTERNATIVES IN CASE OF THE COLLAPSE OF WHAT THEY REGARD AS THEIR SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITHIN THE US. THEY ARE DISCUSSING WITH SECRET

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THE FRENCH THE PURCHASES OF F-1 OR OTHER AIRCRAFT. SOME SAUDI LEADERS MUST ALSO HAVE CONSIDERED WHETHER TO SEEK SOVIET ARMS. A MOVE TO THE SOVIETS, HOWEVER, WOULD BE TAKEN WITH GREAT RELUCTANCE AND ONLY AFTER LONG DELI-

BERATION. WE DOUBT THAT A DENIAL OF THE F-15S WOULD BE ENOUGH TO PROVOKE SUCH A MAJOR POLICY SHIFT. (SECRET)

8. ISRAEL. PRIME MINISTER BEGIN, WHO IS VISITING THE US THIS WEEK TO MARK ISRAEL'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY, WILL PROBABLY USE THE OCCASION TO TRY TO RALLY SUPPORT FOR HIS PEACE STRATEGY FROM JEWISH-AMERICAN AND OTHER INFLUENTIAL GROUPS. BEGIN IS UNLIKELY TO OFFER MORE THAN MINOR ADJUSTMENTS IN HIS EARLIER PROPOSALS. HE MAY POINT TO HIS GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING MORATORIUM ON NEW SETTLEMENT ACTIVITY IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES AND ITS RECENT REINTERPRETATION OF UN RESOLUTION 242-MAKING IT APPLICABLE TO "NEGOTIATIONS" WITH JORDAN-AS EVIDENCE OF THE ISRAELIS' GOOD FAITH.

9. UNDER THE IMPETUS OF THE "PEACE NOW" MOVEMENT, DEBATE OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S PEACE PROPOSALS HAS TAKEN ON NEW MOMENTUM IN ISRAEL SINCE BEGIN LAST VISITED THE US IN MARCH. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, THE DEBATE DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE GENERATED THE MASS SUPPORT OR POLITICAL LEVERAGE NECESSARY TO MOVE BEGIN IN THE DIRECTION OF GREATER FLEXIBILITY.

10. DESPITE ITS SPURT OF ACTIVITY, HOWEVER, THE MOVEMENT HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO BROADEN ITS SUPPORT MUCH BEYOND THE RELATIVELY AFFLUENT, WELL-EDUCATED MIDDLE AND UPPER MIDDLE CLASSES. ITS CONSERVATIVE PRO-GOVERNMENT RIVAL, THE "MOVEMENT FOR A SECURE PEACE," HAS STAGED IMPRESSIVE EFFORTS OF ITS OWN, INDICATING THAT THE ISRAELI PUBLIC REMAINS AMBIVALENT TOWARD BEGIN'S NEGOTIATING STANCE.

11. THE OPPOSITION LABOR ALIGNMENT HAS BEEN ATTACKING THE SECRET

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GOVERNMENT ON NEGOTIATION ISSUES, PARTICULARLY ON THE QUESTION OF WITHDRAWAL FROM THE WEST BANK. BUT LABOR CONTINUES TO SUFFER FROM A LACK OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AND FROM FACTIONAL WRANGLING OVER POLITICAL STRATEGY AND IS NOT NOW SEEN BY MOST ISRAELIS AS A CREDIBLE CHALLENGER.

12. WITHIN THE BEGIN COALITION, A NUMBER OF MODERATES IN THE DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE CONTINUE TO CRITICIZE BEGIN'S HARD LINE, AND A FEW NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY LEADERS APPARENTLY SYMPATHIZE WITH THEIR COMPLAINTS. LEADERS OF THE LIBERAL FACTION IN BEGIN'S LIKUD PARTY CONTINUE TO DISAGREE WITH THE ECONOMIC AND LABOR POLICIES OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S HERUT FACTION. THESE RUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT, HOWEVER, DO NOT APPEAR TO POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR BEGIN.

13. THE CABINET MINISTERS WITH THE GREATEST INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY, DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN AND FOREIGN

MINISTER DAYAN, HAVE LITTLE ABILITY TO PUSH FOR GREATER MODERATION. WEIZMAN HAS ASSUMED MORE OF A LOW-KEY POSITION ON ARAB-ISRAELI ISSUES SINCE HIS ILL-TIMED AND UNSUCCESSFUL CHALLENGE TO BEGIN SEVERAL WEEKS AGO, HE IS NOW PREOCCUPIED WITH THE LEBANON IMBROGLIO. CONSEQUENTLY OTHER CABINET MODERATES, WHO DEPEND ON WEIZMAN'S LEAD, HAVE PROBABLY GROWN LESS INCLINED TO VOICE STRONG OPPOSITION TO BEGIN'S PEACE PLAN.

14. DAYAN, HOWEVER, APPEARS TO BE ENCOURAGING BEGIN TO SHOW GREATER TACTICAL FLEXIBILITY. HIS GREATEST SUCCESS SO FAR HAS BEEN IN SECURING BEGIN'S ENDORSEMENT FOR RE-INTERPRETING RESOLUTION 242. BECAUSE DAYAN REMAINS LARGELY ISOLATED WITHIN THE CABINET AND DEPENDENT ON BEGIN FOR HIS POLITICAL SURVIVAL, HE MUST WORK SLOWLY
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AND CAUTIOUSLY AND CANNOT AFFORD TO GET VERY FAR OUT IN FRONT OF BEGIN ON MAJOR ISSUES.

15. BEGIN HIMSELF IS REPORTED BY SOME TO BE INCREASINGLY PESSIMISTIC AND DISILLUSIONED OVER PEACE PROSPECTS AND POSSIBLY WRESTLING WITH THE IDEA OF SOME MODERATION OF HIS POSITION ON THE WEST BANK. THUS FAR, HOWEVER, HE GIVES NO INDICATION OF BEING WILLING TO DIVORCE HIMSELF FROM HIS DEEPLY HELD CONSERVATIVE IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE NEGOTIATIONS. HE SEEMS EQUALLY AVERSE TO BREAKING WITH HIS POWERFUL SUPPORTERS IN THE HARD-LINE HERUT AND LAAM FACTIONS OF LIKUD AND THE HAWKISH YOUTH WING OF THE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, ALL OF WHICH OPPOSE FURTHER MODERATION IN THE GOVERNMENT'S PEACE PLAN. (CONFIDENTIAL)
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